

Concert Review

Clutch: Live at Newport Music Hall, 2-28-07

By Michael Makuch

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We made the long drive to the Newport Music Hall in Columbus on February 28 to see Clutch. It had been three years since I'd seen Clutch last, so I was pretty excited. I've seen Clutch many times dating back to 1998, so three years was a long gap to not see a live band that feels free to change their set list of songs nightly. Also, in that three years they've had two albums of material released I'd never experienced live. I also anticipated they would play some songs off their new release, *From Beale St. To Oblivion*, which will be released on March 27.

After the largest crowd I have ever seen at Newport had been warmed-up by two opening bands and copious amounts of beer, Clutch took the stage at 10:10 p.m. A note about the crowd. I'm not kidding about the size of the crowd, it was packed to the point of not being able to move about freely unless you stood in the lobby of the buildings entrance, which we did after a point. The lines to get refreshing beverages were ridiculously long and convoluted. Lines intertwined and merged in such a way: it was impossible to tell where one started and stopped. My beverage purchase would have to wait. I seriously considered not buying anything to drink as I would have to hold it a long time because the line for the bathroom was worse than the beverage line. I knew that once Clutch started playing, almost impossibly so, that the crowd would push closer to the stage and the lines wouldn't be as long, so we retreated to the front lobby to wait it out.

Out in the lobby we people-watched and saw a lot of beer spilled as people groped and staggered at the steps to the balcony level. This was definitely a drinkin' show.

Clutch started playing and, sure enough, the lines slimmed down to tolerable levels. Only tolerable because I still had a ten minute wait until I got to the counter where I was then promptly ignored by the bartenders. It is amazing that you can be only a few feet away from several people and yet, not be seen at all! I must have turned my Romulan cloaking device on by accident. I finally got a beer after a bartender a couple of bartenders down waved my girlfriend over, *who was standing behind me*. It galls me that there are gigantic tip jars present with service like this.

Meanwhile, Clutch ripped into their show with barely caged fury. They opened the show with a few songs from "Blast Tyrant," which was released in 2004. Over the next two hours Clutch played songs that go back as far as 1999's, "Jam Room" but nothing older than that which probably disappointed their older, more hardcore fans. For me it was great because they played, mostly, songs I'd not heard live before including many songs from their forthcoming album "From Beale St. To Oblivion." On stage, at different times, there were as many as seven people on stage, which is a departure from tours gone past. They did have an organ player who has since joined the band and recorded with them since the last time I saw them live. This time they were joined on stage by a second guitar player and harmonica player. These additional players added a new dynamic to a group who has never been a boring live experience. Overall, it was a great time out despite the over-abundance of people. I certainly look forward to hearing Clutch's new album and to seeing them live again. For those who missed this show, you can see them perform at Bogart's on Cincinnati on May 15.